

Tech Corner

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By Ken Woodson

With the recent shortage of hops, I have received a few requests to discuss growing hops locally. Personally, I have not tried to grow my own hops, but I do know a few home brewers that have successfully grown Cascade hops here in the DFW area.

Hops should be planted in the early spring, around February or March. So, if you are planning to grow hops this season, you need to purchase and plant the hop rhizome very soon. The rhizome is the plant stem that grows underground and supplies food for new growth. See your local homebrew shop to buy hop rhizomes.

Before planting the rhizome you should prepare your hop garden. Here are a few considerations:

- Hops require sunshine and water; however, wind can damage hop plants. So, find a place in your backyard that is accessible to sunshine and water, and can also act as a wind break for your hop plants.
- Hops require nutrients, so fertilize the soil with the proper amount of nutrients
- Remove weeds or other unwanted vegetation that may compete with your hops
- Hops grow vertically, so you need to train them by tying the hop vine in a clockwise fashion around a wire or trellis.

Once your hop plant is growing be wary of pests like aphids and spider mites. Aphids are a translucent pale green bug that favors cool weather. You can control aphids naturally with ladybugs. The ladybugs will not harm your hop plant; however, they do eat aphids. Another way to control aphids is by spraying the hop vine with anti-bacterial soap.

Spider mites enjoy hot weather and are difficult to see. They leave a visible web on the underside of leaves. If you have a problem with spider mites, they can be controlled with insecticides.

Be watchful for diseases on your hop plants too. The three diseases to watch for are mildew, wilt, and virus infections. If the leaves begin to curl under and have a whitish-gray film then your hop plant probably has mildew.

If your hop leaves turn yellow and begin to die, your hop plant probably has developed wilt. In either case, remove the infected portion of your hop plant from the hop garden to prevent further outbreaks. Fungicides can be used against mildew and wilt. Hops require a lot of water; however, water should not be allowed to stay on the hop vines after sundown due to the increased risk of mildew and other diseases.

Hops can be harvested during summer and autumn, depending on hop variety. You know the hop is ready for harvest when you see yellow dust at the base of each scale of the cone. Also, a hop cone that is ripe and ready to be picked has a drier, more papery feel.

Hops are a perennial plant. After harvest, the hop leaves will turn brown and fall from the vine. At this point, it is time to trim back the old growth to allow the plant to survive the winter months and be ready for new growth in the spring.

Finally, we should mention that some German hops like Hallertauer don't grow as well here in the U.S. as they do in Germany. However, Tettnanger appears to grow well here in the U.S.

If you would like to read more about growing your own hops here is a good resource:

Homegrown Hops, An Illustrated How-To-Do-It Manual, by David R. Beach